DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 170 CE 041 888

AUTHOR Robinson, Joan, Ed.; And Others
TITLE Learning Partnerships: Interdependent Learning in Adult Education.
INSTITUTION Ontario Inst. for Studies in Education, Toronto. Dept. of Adult Education.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-7749-9802-1
PUB DATE Jul 85
NOTE 65p.
AVAILABLE FROM CISE Publication Sales, 252 Bloor Street, W., Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6 ($3.00 Canadian).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Collected Works - General (020)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Adult Learning; *Adult Programs; Annotated Bibliographies; Case Studies; Cooperative Planning; Cooperative Programs; Educational Benefits; *Educational Cooperation; Educational Strategies; Foreign Countries; *Learning Strategies; Outcomes of Education; Peer Influence; *Peer Teaching; Postsecondary Education; Training; *Training Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Learning Partnerships; Ontario

ABSTRACT

This volume contains essays and studies dealing with learning partnerships in adult education. The introduction, written by Joan Robinson and Sharon Saberton, discusses the concept of the learning partnership, defined as a peer relationship between two people for whom the main objective is learning. The second section consists of comments of students in the Department of Adult Education of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) who have participated in a learning partnership and a report by Ross Keane entitled "A Case Study of a Two-Year Learning Partnership." Presented in the third section are an interview with Marge Denis, an OISE staff member who has participated in a successful learning partnership, and an essay by Virginia Griffin entitled "A Teacher's View of Learning Partnerships: or, Why Didn't I Think of It Years Ago?" Presented next are the following papers examining the use of learning partnerships in settings other than OISE: "Applying the Partnership Concept in Training Programs" by Sharon Saberton; "The Use of Learning Partnerships in a Five-Day Residential Lab" by Joan D. Conway; and "Notes on Assorted Applications of Learning Partnerships" by Virginia Griffin. Concluding the volume is an annotated bibliography. (MN)

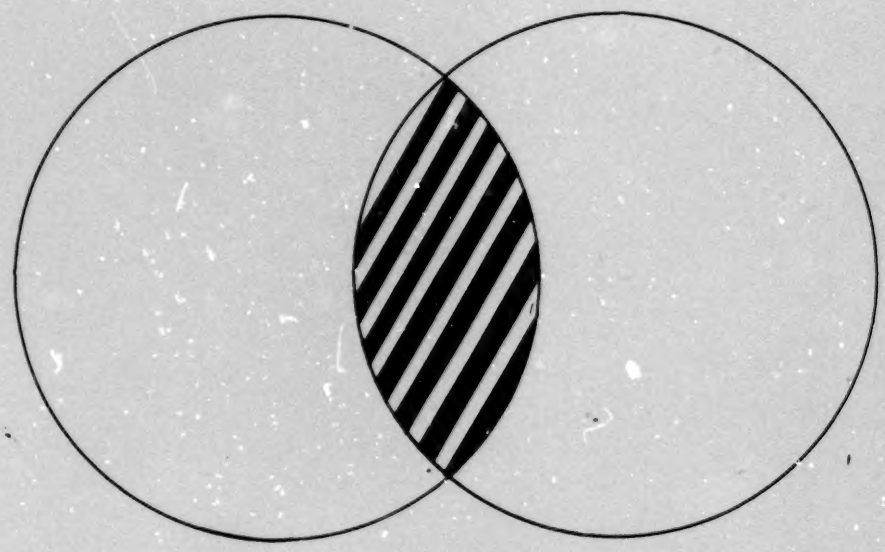
****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED259170

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Learning Partnerships:

Interdependent Learning in Adult Education



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Edited by:
Joan Robinson
Sharon Saberton
Virginia Griffin

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

V Griffin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Department of Adult Education

July, 1985

CE 041 858

© 1985
Department of Adult Education
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5S 1V6

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except for brief passages quoted for review purposes.

ISBN 0-7749-9802-1

JOAN E. ROBINSON is a librarian at the North York Public Library and a student in the Adult Education Department at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

SHARON SABERTON is program chairman, Diagnostic Radiography Division, Toronto Institute of Medical Technology, and a student in the Adult Education Department at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

VIRGINIA R. GRIFFIN is an associate professor in the Adult Education Department at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Contents

Section		Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		(i)
1.	INTRODUCTION Joan Robinson and Sharon Saberton	1
2.	THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP EXPERIENCE	
	Comments of Participants	5
	A Case Study of a Two-Year Learning Partnership Ross Keane	19
3.	THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP AS FACILITATORS SEE IT	
	An Interview with Marge Denis	27
	A Teacher's View of Learning Partners: or, Why Didn't I Think of It Years Ago? Virginia Griffin	37
4.	THE CONCEPT USED IN SETTINGS OTHER THAN OISE	
	Applying the Partnership Concept in Training Programs Sharon Saberton	47
	The Use of Learning Parnerships in a Five-Day Residential Lab Joan D. Conway	50
	Notes on Assorted Applications of Learning Partnerships Virginia Griffin	52
5.	ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY	54

Acknowledgements

A truly collaborative approach to scholarship was taken in the compilation of this publication. As Sharon Saberton and I began to recognize the positive effect that participating in a partnership had had on our learning, we began to encourage our peers to document their experiences with learning partnerships. Students and instructors, many of whom were completing course requirements, showed their commitment to the project by agreeing to be interviewed, by submitting papers, and by participating in a day-long workshop devoted to exploring the subject. Some participants went on to introduce learning partnerships in a variety of settings.

Without the dedicated support and co-operation of those people, there would have been no personal data available for the publication. We also are indebted to our colleagues, particularly to Dr. Virginia Griffin, who first introduced the concept of learning partnerships as part of her course on facilitating basic processes in adult learning. Through her belief in the importance of the project from the very beginning, she provided vital encouragement, significant written contributions, and valuable editorial expertise. We are also grateful to Dr. Marge Denis, who suggested publication as a means of acquainting adult educators with the idea.

We would like to recognize the individuals who have made contributions over the past three years: Joan D. Conway, Rita Fridella, Casey Gehrels, Mary Helen Garvin, Margaret Johnston, Ross Keane, Norma Kinney, Renate Krakauer, Kathy Manuel, Joan Summers, and Marianne Williams. We gratefully acknowledge their trust in allowing us to make their personal experiences and insights an integral part of the following pages.

Finally, we would like to thank Kathleen Johnson for her excellent help as copy editor, and Joan May for her patience, supportive attitude, and speed in typing the manuscript.

This project was funded under the Small-Scale Research Project program through the Department of Adult Education of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

April 26, 1985 J.E.R.

1 Introduction

Joan E. Robinson and Sharon Saberton

The concept of learning with a partner is not new. Students often work in pairs to complete course assignments or prepare for exams. If we accept that learning is predominantly a relational activity, then learning with a partner is a natural component of the learning process. In this publication we have accepted the premise advocated by the Department of Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), which intentionally encourages relational learning activities.

Since the concept of learning partnerships has not been much researched or written about, some preliminary clarification and definition are in order. A learning partnership is a peer relationship between two people, for whom the main objective is learning -- "learning" being defined as change affecting knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, or understanding. "Learning" differentiates these partnerships from friendship, marriage, and other forms of peer interaction. This is not to say, of course, that learning does not take place in other types of relationships; but it is not the primary objective for the formation of the relationship.

It was not our intention to present an objective statistical study; instead, we chose to offer meanings derived by people engaged in the experience. We do not claim that others in different settings would have the same experience, but we hope to sensitize the reader to another teaching strategy.

The Department of Adult Education fosters a learning environment which does not necessarily have a prescribed course of study. The Department attempts to help students integrate ideas, experiences, and new perspectives which have personal meanings directed toward a personal goal. It is a person-centered approach to learning rather than a content-centered approach, and it respects each individual regardless of the extent of his personal experience or stage of learning.

The potential of the learning partnership as a means for enhancing learning among adults has only been recognized and applied recently. About six years ago Dr. Virginia Griffin of the Department of Adult Education at OISE began to incorporate the use of learning partners as part of her teaching technique, primarily in her course entitled "Basic Processes in Facilitating Adult Learning." She suggested to her students that they might benefit from choosing learning partners with whom they could talk over and make sense of things happening in the class. Her suggestion was based on her observations of students who had formed dyads naturally.

Wherever collaborative learning among adults takes place, the learning parnership has the potential to be used. The concept enhances rather than replaces existing teaching and learning strategies. The intent of this publication is to introduce and describe the learning partnership as part of the learning process.

Our documentation is based on personal experience, qualitative research, interviews, and papers written specifically for this publication. Contributors were invited to take an experiential approach when documenting their experiences by reflecting, theorizing, and applying the concept of learning partnerships.

The publication is divided into five sections. The first section is this Introduction. The second is presented from the learner's point of view, and explores themes such as insights that resulted from having a learning partner, what learning partners did when they met, and characteristics of learning partnerships. This section concludes with a report by Ross Keane describing his experiences in a learning partnership that lasted two years.

Presented from the teacher's point of view, the third section describes the benefits and problems of learning partnerships. The attitudes that help to ensure positive experiences for the teacher, the dyad, and the group are outlined.

In the fourth section, applications of learning partnerships are documented based on the experience of facilitators who are currently using the concept in a variety of settings. These settings include school administration, allied health, distance education, and a residential learning laboratory.

The fifth section contains an annotated bibliography of books that should be useful to anyone undertaking a learning parnership.

We recognize that there are many unanswered questions about learning partnerhips. Some of the questions we have identified include the following: How can the partnerships be made more effective? For whom can they be useful? In what kinds of learning experiences other than academic courses will they work? In which content areas of learning can they be useful? What is the difference in quality of learning between individuals who choose a partner and individuals who choose to work alone? What is the relational difference between study groups and learning partnerships? What effect do learning partnerships (as opposed to study groups) have on the larger group?

We are indebted to the participants who believed strongly enough in the value of their experience with the idea to take the time to document their insights. Their valuable contributions make this publication possible. The challenge is to use the research and the suggested recommendations to explore the role of learning partnerships in life-long learning.

2 The Learning Partnership Experience

Comments of Participants

The personal side of participating in a learning partnership is presented in the following section. Quotations have been selected from an informal questionnaire, papers, and interviews. Comments are from students in the Department of Adult Education, OISE, which is an environment that encourages relational learning activities. Quotations are grouped according to several themes which emerged as data were studied.

People have been identified by their first names, except where the name is duplicated; in those cases the last initial has been included. Their comments have been edited only to the extent necessary for clarity.

Selecting a Learning Partner

Once the decision has been made to participate in a learning partnership, the first task is the selection of a partner. How does one select a partner? In the following extracts partners describe how they found one another.

> I sat beside you. We have had quite a history. I realize now that our learning partnership started long before we named it as such. (Rita)

> One of the few signs as to whether the other person is a kindred spirit and possible learning partner is the fact that the person is searching. If a person has all the answers, I'll run the other way. (Marge)

> We were sufficiently the same and sufficiently different to know that we could learn from each other. He was available to me, interested in one element of my work, and I was able to offer him some useful input in return. (Joan R.)

> We chose one another as learning partners primarily because we liked one another. The first time that I met her I experienced an intuitive sense that we would in fact work together and get to know one another well. (Sharon)

> It started simply enough - we had a common desire to share learning as it related to our course. (Casey)

> We held similar values, but at the same time there was a sense that my prospective partner was "different from me." (Joan R.)

We had similar backgrounds, and a sense of similar values. I think that was important. (Ross)

Why are we drawn to some people and not others? What led us to choose one another? What was it that attracted us? I don't remember. It happened that first summer when we were in a course which did not suggest learning partners. We sought each other out. We talked about some values; we had some commonalities and similar backgrounds, and thought that we had some common goals that we could use to help one another. This would be in terms of resources and background. (Casey)

We shared histories and found joint experiences which led us to reflect on our past. Through this sharing trust was created in our relationship. Joan and I became learning partners in order to share learning experiences and to clarify insights and new understandings. (Sharon)

Arrangements Made Early in the Partnership

As partners work with one another, arrangements and agreements are established. The following extracts provide some examples.

I'm convinced that honesty is a very difficult thing. I'm talking about deep integrity. I think in a learning partnership the integrity issue must be struggled with.
(Marge)

Permission is given to offer criticism whereas peers might not or might be reluctant to do so. Peers might be afraid of offending. To me, that's the big payoff for learning partners, because permission is given to say a lot of things that one might be very sensitive about.
(Marge)

What needs to be present in a partnership before I will allow and maintain an openness for possible transformation? What immediately comes to mind is "trust." What I mean by "trust" is knowing that you will be there for me in certain ways, in ways that will support and nurture my growth process. You will risk being open and vulnerable with me and allow me to be the same with you.
(Rita)

What I am now realizing is that a learning partnership evolves over time; time to trust, time to connect, time to transform. It is also the mutual responsibility of both individuals to work toward and maintain a learning partnership. (Rita)

There has to be the freedom to name the pinches in the relationship. In the freedom of doing that you bond closer together. (Casey)

It was important throughout the experience to constantly affirm our differentness and separateness, since that seemed to contribute an important element in the process of transforming perspectives. (Mary Helen)

We did not structure much formality into our meetings, but we did share a common commitment to review experiences and things learned as they related to our course. (Casey)

Giving and receiving feedback became the hallmark of our sessions. (Casey)

Trust as an element in a learning partnership determines how power issues are dealt with. (Joan R.)

If one partner is not pulling her load, just being dragged along, then that's destructive. An issue I'm becoming increasingly aware of is how I'm affected by other people's energies. If you are with another person who is dragging, the situation can drain energy right away. (Marge)

> The rewards are often the very source of the disadvantages. Effectiveness is based on commitment, which leads to unquestioned benefits but which also requires investment of time and energy. In a world controlled by the clock, the limitation of time - to meet regularly, to discuss, to process, etc. - becomes the most frequently mentioned disadvantage in learning partnerships. (Renata)

What Learning Partners Do

Perhaps the question most often asked by people who are interested in pursuing a learning partnership is how learning partners spend their time together. The following extracts offer some answers.

> The task we faced after selecting one another was that of finding direction and purpose for the time we would spend together. Finding a time seemed an insurmountable task at this stage. Both of us had very crowded schedules, and since we didn't have a strong sense of direction, the experience was not a priority. We decided to meet over lunch immediately following the weekly class. Being of an organized nature, I thought we should have an agenda but my schedule was so hectic that I felt relieved when Rita clearly stated her desire not to have to do special preparatory work. We decided that as a beginning we would share the reflections from our learning journals for the course. (Mary Helen)

> We simply would start by chatting about class or about a recent book or, more often than not, about an idea one of us was excited about. We shared "air time" informally and let the situation determine, by being responsive to each other's enthusiasm, whether more time was required. We were never stuck for a topic to discuss and I was never bored; the time always flew! I believe that much of the success of our partnership was due to the fact that we were prepared to disclose personal feelings. We tended to use the first-person singular to speak of personal experiences and the meanings we created from them. In our partnership, we fell into a pattern of reviewing the meeting

before we broke up, which in turn was very helpful for the purpose of our journals, which we each kept to reflect upon insights and experiences. (Casey)

I have become aware that reflection is a very important skill in my learning; it is something that I had always done but I did not realize that it was so valuable to learning. Reflection became incorporated in the learning partnership. (Marianne)

I feel that there was always a checking of the process that went on. We always built an agenda at the beginning. And we would ask "What does it do for you," and "Was it a good session for me," and "What did I learn," and "What should be different," and "When will we meet again?" There was a constant checking. The evaluation was very formative and ongoing. (Casey)

Together we continued to work at achieving insights, and as a result we grew to trust our intuition. We adjusted our supportive positions according to the needs of each partner. (Sharon)

The scheduled time was important to me, since I like to organize my time rather formally, and it also allowed me to look forward to our special hour each week. (Casey)

Ross has a couple of habits, like making copious notes as we talk. When I speak and he makes notes it is to me a very ego-building kind of thing. On several occasions, he took a tape recorder and transcribed the tapes of our learning partnership. My other learning partner has exceptional listening skills. I get a lot of esteem-building in those types of things. I get a lot of very positive feedback from being in the partnership. It feels good to know that you are being listened to. (Casey)

We met once every two weeks, but we made contact by phone at least once a week. From the beginning of our partnership we have always had an agenda for our meetings. In order to flourish, our learning partnership needs energy. Although the contact that we make on the telephone is good, our learning

partnership needs the energy that results from face-to-face meetings. (Sharon)

In looking back now, I understand that there was trust there; this was an interdependent relationship, not an interaction - our partnership was founded and built on challenge and nurture. That foundation supports risk-taking. (Casey)

Learning That Resulted from Having a Learning Partner

In the following statements individuals summarize insights that resulted from their experience in learning partnerships.

"Learning" I would define as a redefinition of meaning. As I become involved in the partnership I find myself moving from content to a focus on learning that has to do with me and understanding myself. (Ross)

We often became caught in a surge of enthusiasm and excitement; learning and changing became joyous, where before they were often threatening. (Casey)

Learning partners were crucial in validating the importance of learning from their own experiences and being responsible for their own reactions, rather than learning only the theoretical content. Others expressed feelings of incompetence in the experiental learning environment: "I must be missing something." Learning partnerships were valuable in building self-esteem and feelings of competence for some individuals. (Joan S.)

The relationship became highly interdependent, each of us giving and receiving support and care. The mutual trust we developed for one another allowed us to relate in a dialectic of person and learner, of self and friend. As our relationship developed, mutuality and interconnectedness increased and we grew not only as learners, becoming more creative and resourceful, but more compassionate as people. (Casey)

> Once I was able to start seeing myself as able to be separate from the situation, to be "disidentified" from some of my internal processes, I became more centered and I became a more compassionate helper. (Casey)

> The learning parnership, provided the participants are willing to struggle through an interdependent relationship, is an ideal place for two people to be empowered. Personal knowledge is the basis of personal authority and power. It is not only self-empowering, it empowers the others in that it frees them to make clear decisions according to their own personal authority.
> (Mary Helen)

> The new perspective I had developed of myself as a result of the partnership allowed me to view myself in much greater harmony with my feelings and my own image of myself as a learner. (Casey)

Having the courage to challenge assumptions emerged as an important factor in the learning partnership.

> In a number of instances, particularly involving confrontations, I've had my perspectives totally changed, not just the same insights broadened. Or other insights have risen like a Gestalt, risen to a level of awareness that I didn't have. I have had significant perspective transformations, particularly about myself and my style because of my relationship with Casey. That has become very important to me. Very significant insights about my own behaviour have come ... I feel that without the learning partnership, I would still be in the swamp. Each time I feel I get out of the swamp, I end up getting myself in another one, but then, it's in the partnership. Part of that is challenge. My learning partner gave me some very strong confrontation which helped me once again to get out of the swamp.
> (Ross)

When Partnerships Were Most Effective

Participants saw the "payoff" from a learning partnership as an opportunity to fulfil personal learning needs in a supportive environment.

> The assumption in our educational culture is that papers are a tool by which the teacher evaluates the student. Therefore, the paper must be the work of the individual student. My own perspective of this has been in the process of change. My learning partner and I had worked on this project of "Learning Partnership." The very nature of the project had undermined an old and firmly fixed perspective. Once this assumption had been confronted by both of us, I began to be able to write without feeling lonely and helpless. (Mary Helen)

> We agreed that the learning process was much less painful and stressful when shared with a learning partner. (Sharon)

> We started to be able to take risks with our ideas and behaviour; we were able to play. (Casey)

> We still scrutinize and evaluate our relationship. We work at removing the threat of evaluation by giving one another positive reinforcement. Although the unknown intimidates us, through evaluation we free ourselves.
> (Sharon)

> To me, a real characteristic of our learning partnership is a lack of competitiveness ... The support I received from my learning partners helped me to gain the confidence to challenge and accept the assumptions which form the basis of personal perspectives. I came to feel cradled by their care and concern, allowing me to recognize their acceptance of me, which allowed me to eventually accept myself to a much greater extent. (Casey)

> Often, learning partnerships make it possible to continue in a group or to interact with other members in a more constructive and positive way. (Margaret)

> I can say now that an ingredient which is present for me in a learning partnership is the willingness to be transformed by the other ... You and I both took the "Learning Style Inventory" in class. My learning style profile came out lopsided. I was extremely high on concrete experience and reflective observation and extremely low on abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. You, my dear learning partner, ended up with a perfect diamond which reflects that you are balanced in all modes of learning. How lucky can I get? I write this with a smile on my face and for the moment recall how much laughter we shared between us. It is because of your tendency to abstract and conceptualize from our dialogue that over time I began to do the same in our sessions. It is important, as I have said, to have similar biographies in order to connect with another but it is also true that I need to be with another who is different from myself so that I can expand my boundaries. Yes, we did share laughter between us. I could never have had so much fun on my own. Humour has been a missing element in my learning up until now. It is through our partnership I have come to see that my learning need not be serious. But it is more fun with two. (Rita)

Personal Development

The qualities in the relationship which enable personal growth were identified by several persons.

> Once I had become truly sensitive to the learning needs of my partners, I was able to become a true facilitator of learning. (Casey)

> The freedom to express personal differences within our learning partnership, I feel, has been vital for my own personal growth and the growth of our partnership. (Rita)

For me, it's holding myself open to what truth might be. I don't automatically assume what Casey says to me is right. I give him a lot of credence, but I hold myself open to what might be true in what he says, and then try and find the truth. (Ross)

First, we provided a safe place for each other to talk freely about what was important to us. Often the expression of feelings of discomfort or frustration pointed to an underlying assumption that was being recognized. Careful listening to one another with honest feedback about what was being heard or observed, questioning in order to clarify or focus an issue coupled with willingness on the part of the speaker of the moment to be open and vulnerable, contributed to bringing assumptions to the surface. (Mary Helen)

Our partnership provided us with a forum for expression, and through that forum we were motivated to learn. We shared common values. We both value integrity, and basic to integrity is trust. We were committed to the parnership and felt secure in the knowledge that the parameters were known. We shared the expectation to learn and we were able to accept criticism and advice. Finally, our mutual respect for one another, both intuitive and intellectual, was seen as an integral factor in our partnership. The periodic review of our learning partnership and communication of new hopes and expectations were also identified as being positive and essential parts of our partnership. (Sharon)

Joan never criticized or judged: rather, she offered support and gave me permission and courage to take risks. (Sharon)

I had the courage to search for relevant learning opportunities. This search was greatly aided by my learning partners, who, like me, were exploring the same general topics and interests. (Casey)

The learning partnership, if it is defined as consisting of peers, has the strong potential to facilitate self-knowledge provided the participants have some capacity for reflection, and are willing to move into critical reflection. (Mary Helen)

Changes in the Partnership Over Time

As in all relationships, learning partnerships change over time. These changes may be viewed as stages or transitions. Here the partners decribe the process of change.

> I do not believe transformations have to be monumental changes in one's consciousness. They can be a small re-forming which can have a meaningful impact on one's life. (Rita)

> During one of our first meetings we talked about "learning smart." The idea was that we wanted to be efficient learners. We would share ideas and concepts. It started at an idea level. Later we started thinking about thesis topics. At that time, I think the partnership became deeper. We started to explore things that had meaning, that were pretty close to our hearts. Then there developed an extra emotional component to the partnership. We experienced a movement toward intimacy.
> (Casey)

> Joan and I noted that a shift had taken place in our expectations. We now meet to learn instead of with the concrete expectation of accomplishing tasks. (Sharon)

> There were "needs" expressed both in the dyad and in the group in phase 1 of the learning partnership. The needs were for emotional expression: disclosing of feelings and thoughts and requests for help and support. In phase 2 of the learning partnership, in the individual, the dyad, and the group, the needs became achievement-oriented. The demand was to get the content out, challenge the cognitive process, and add new ideas to the old. The synthesis of "thinking and not thinking" happened in phase 3 of the learning partnership. Harmony began to be operative between the mind and the body, the feelings, and the cognitive process. The needs of the learners and their relationship to the basic processes of

facilitating adult learning finally became part of my understanding. Emotional and cognitive harmony is essential to learning. (Marianne)

I would attribute growth and development in a learning partnership to trust. As there is more trust between two persons, they are more open to confrontation. At first, when the trust level is not necessarily there, it's hard to confront things that have really deep meaning. That's where this deepening starts happening. It becomes a self-fulfilling thing. If you do the confrontation, and you work it through, then the trust becomes deeper again. It becomes cyclical. (Casey)

My personal struggles were an inhibiting factor and had to be dealt with. While dealing with personal struggles, we were doing new learning not directly related to tasks. This was a departure for us. Our meetings involved the sharing of ideas and information that we were not able to talk to anyone else about. It was important for us to verbalize ideas and feelings in order to sort out where we were coming from. Although we challenge one another, we have never used a direct confrontation stance. Rather, we choose our language carefully and we are very sensitive to one another's feelings. We confront, but we do not feel that we have to impose values or culture on one another. We do not have to impose because of our high security level. As a result, we have found a balance in the partnership. When our learning partnership flounders, we sense instability, but there is trust that the partnership will return to that point of balance. (Sharon)

Marilyn and I are no longer learning partners. Now we have a friendship. We have moved in different ways in our professional careers. (Marge)

Keeping the Partnership on Course

Often, students are tempted to associate the learning partnership with a friendship. The main objective in the learning partnership, however, is learning. As in any relationship, problems do arise. Here some partners describe the ways in which they dealt with those problems.

Reluctantly, but honestly, we now admitted that the inhibiting factor in our partnership would be a lack of a specific project to complete or a problem to solve. (Sharon)

The development of support and friendship of a learning partnership may lead to dependency. The partnership can become so comfortable that one or both partners are reluctant to proceed to new learning, perhaps with a new learning partner or independently. (Renata)

I feel control is an issue where trust is a little lacking and where there is competitiveness. The need for control, I think, comes from an insecurity. The more I'm insecure the more I must control. And I can do it in very civilized ways. But if I'm totally secure, then I can let any process spill over where it wants to go. (Marge)

What makes a learning partnership work is to be able to talk about things that have personal meaning. I suspect that what would be inhibiting would be if dialogue had no personal meaning. You could tolerate that for a while, but that would not be the basis on which you would have a learning partnership. (Casey)

A Case Study of a Two-Year Learning Partnership

Ross Keane

Almost two years ago, in my first class at OISE, I was asked to exchange information about myself with a stranger next to me and then introduce him to the group. This man, Casey Gehrels, became my learning partner, an esteemed friend, a valuable resource, and a significant influence in my learning journey over the following two years. In this paper I will reflect on the formation of the partnership, identify four distinct phases in the dynamic movement of the partnership over two years, and offer some thoughts about this type of partnership as a valuable aid to learning.

During many of our partnership meetings I taped the discussions and later made transcripts or succinct notes to capture key ideas that I might have missed in the original exchanges. I have drawn on these transcripts for some of Casey's reflections on the partnership.

The Formation of the Learning Partnership

In retrospect, I think Casey and I decided to form an ongoing learning partnership because of similarities in our backgrounds, study circumstances, goals, values, and pragmatic needs. In gathering background information to introduce Casey to the class group, I was struck by our similarities. We came from educational administration backgrounds and had chosen to pursue doctoral studies in adult learning rather than educational administration as we prepared for continued work with teachers. We had each

enrolled in the "Developing Human Resources" specialization; we were living away from our home bases; and we were approximately the same age. We both wanted to complete a doctoral program within two years, and consequently we saw ourselves as men in a hurry, needing to "think smart and work smart" in our studies. In addition to recognizing shared backgrounds and circumstances, I sensed a similarity in the values and beliefs that shaped our approaches to life. Casey's intellectual honesty and his attitude of respect and concern toward me as a person impressed me. Pragmatism also played a part: we could help each other achieve our goals within a limited time span. Thus the learning partnership was struck.

Phases of the Partnership

Over its two-year life cycle, this partnership responded to and was shaped by our emerging needs. It was not a static partnership; its functions and mode of operation changed as our needs changed. The life of the partnership can be divided into four phases.

The first phase

Our first summer at OISE was the initial phase of our partnership. At this time we became better acquainted and helped each other identify available learning resources. We spent casual time together, shared meals, met with resource people, and identified the instructors and classes that might help us meet the learning goals that were being clarified. Our meetings were friendly, and without formal agendas. We were strongly task-centered. I was dependent on Casey for his knowledge of educational and city resources.

Casey recalled his difficulty in finding personal meaning in material I shared relating to a context he had not

experienced. He felt remote and less than completely involved.

Finally, there was an element of guardedness in our relationship. Interdependence involves a fragile concept of self. It is an attitude as well as an action, a state of mind as well as a behaviour. In this phase we tended to project ourselves as we wished to be perceived by the other. I was concerned with sharing my "all together" side more than the vulnerability and feelings. Barriers to sharing were present in this phase in spite of our contractual intention of committing ourselves fully to this learning partnership. Growth toward interdependence evolved slowly as we overcame these barriers and built the appropriate attitudes and state of mind.

The second phase

The second phase of the partnership coincided with the first semester of course work in our programs. Two-thirds of our courses were shared, and this contributed to a deepening of our relationship. We elected to share the same core group in the Thesis Research Seminar, where we developed ideas relating to thesis topics. We met formally each week for a minimum of an hour, sometimes over a meal. In these meetings we named individual concerns and compiled an agenda which was followed in our discussions. Often I tape-recorded our discussions, reviewed the tape later, and made notes of key insights. In transcribing the tapes I noticed many times that material on the tape was different from the way I perceived it during our discussion. Transcription allowed me to identify more clearly some of my own assumptions and their impact on the way I perceived things, and to break free of at least some of my own perspectives and interests.

Trust developed, personal challenges were issued, and individual interests were explored. Our sharing in this phase began to include the affective as well as the cognitive, and rewards began to appear. Mutuality and interdependence appeared more strongly in this phase, and excitement in learning began to mount.

The third phase

The third phase, which commenced half-way through the course work, was characterized by a movement toward deeper levels of trust and vulnerability. We shared our feelings and personal concerns. The partnership moved to a new level when Casey interviewed me on the topic of personal doubts. I hoped to benefit from the experience of such interviews, since I planned to conduct similar interviews with others for my thesis. In reflecting on the effect of this series of interviews on our relationship, Casey was aware of a growth in trust and unconditional acceptance. My risk-taking freed Casey to take risks as well. This resulted in important insights and developments in the partnership.

The fourth phase

The fourth phase coincided with the post-residency period. The partnership now offered support in the lonely task of thesis writing and continued to provide an opportunity for sharing our personal concerns. Casey lived in Thunder Bay in this phase and returned to Toronto once a month for one to three days of discussion relating to our theses and personal matters. Casey completed his thesis, but we continued to meet as I worked toward the completion of mine. By this stage the level of sharing was consistently open, honest, and affective as well as cognitive. He spoke of being listened to in a qualitatively different way - a way that facilitated

sharing for him because it left him feeling valued as a person. Significantly, he identified the quality of listening and empathy as more important than equal time for raising issues within the partnership. He acknowledged that often I had more issues for discussion than he did, and he accepted that as part of our interdependent partnership.

By the fourth phase the more rigid agenda of earlier partnership meetings was replaced by a simpler and more basic organization. In this period our meetings varied in length from several hours to several days. We exchanged material through the mail and checked in by phone regularly.

Summary

In summary, the experience of the four phases of the partnership suggests a series of movements over time as attitudes of interdependence and trust were created. There was a movement from pleasant but uninvolving dicussions on ideas toward more involving engagements which included feeling and were closer to the heart. There was a movement from dependency and independence toward interdependence. There was a movement from general feelings of attraction and affinity toward deeper feelings of mutuality, trust, closeness, and love. There was a movement from the application of external knowledge and models toward dealing with personally meaningful issues. There was a movement from tightly structured meetings toward meetings organized around attitudes of inclusion, respect, and concern for the other. There was a movement from concerns about finding direction and resources in initial learning toward providing support and challenge in the learning associated with thesis writing and coping with life. There was a movement from patient listening toward more empathic listening. Finally, there was a movement from detached and idiosyncratic sharing toward bonding and collaborative discovery, which synergistically generated excitement and new learning.

The Learning Partnership and Learning

Participation in the learning partnership played an important part in my reflection and learning over a two-year period. In this section I will identify some of the ways this partnership experience affected my learning.

Learning is a process of making meaning

Through the articulation of my ideas, hypotheses, and interpretations of experiences, I often came to understand them at a deeper level. It helped to "bounce them off" my partner. Similarly, in processing class and life experiences with a trusted other, I was able to look closely at strong feelings and turn them into new insights. In discussing feeling-laden experiences with a trusted other I was eventually able to separate issues of learning from issues of self-esteem.

An important gain for me from this partnership was a new ability to focus on what was happening inside myself rather than what was happening inside others when I was involved in a feeling-laden situation. This perspective switch has enabled me to use my own feelings as a source of self-knowledge, to search for patterns of behaviour and perception, and to interpret my behaviours in more useful ways. With the help of my partner I discovered it was more productive to ask what is happening inside me than to make assumptions about others.

Expanding insights through sharing with a significant other

Casey often commented on aspects of shared experiences which I had not noted or considered important, and I learned a great deal in this way. I suspect this was part of the

improved quality of listening referred to by Casey. A readiness to consider seriously what had not been part of my perspective was, I think, directly related to my learning partner's status in my eyes as a significant other. As the partnership moved toward interdependence and trust, we let go of initial fears - such as the need to protect ourselves from hurt, to never reach deep levels of sharing, and to refrain from showing vulnerability lest the other might return to it again. For my part, I came to value Casey as a knowledgeable learner and tried to hold myself open to his perspectives, particularly when they were revealed in unexpected or unusual observations. Openness to our two perspectives of shared experience increased the amount of experiential data available for processing in our meetings.

Opening new directions in reading and learning

It was not unusual for me to leave learning partnership meetings highly energized and motivated to pursue further aspects of our discussion. Casey had spoken about several theses in the library; I read them. I borrowed papers from other students as a result of hearing Casey talk of their work. I delved more deeply into the writings of several learning theorists, notably Paiget, Mezirow, and Habermas, as a result of his references to their research in our meetings. In turn, he followed leads and developed interests out of my comments and references. These meetings put us in touch wih a wider range of resources and opened up new avenues of learning and interest.

Challenge or confrontation as a source of new perspectives

Some of the most important things learned in this partnership were accompanied by the emotional risks of challenge and an associated possibility of damage to the relationship or loss of the esteem of the partner. I offer one detailed

illustration of this. In a meeting in the second phase of the partnership Casey confronted me with feedback about my style of "helping" people. This confrontation disoriented me and initiated a search for a new perspective and approach in my efforts to help others learn. Over time, as I worked to understand and accept Casey's feedback, I began to examine my practice of interpreting others' experience in the light of my models; this led to more precise thinking about the appropriateness of models for different types of learning theories and different ways of knowing; and eventually it led to a deep personal understanding of my valency for instructional methods that promote dependency in learners. I was able to explore, alone and with others, emotional needs that unconsciously led me to seek to put others into dependent positions and then experience myself as the saviour who could carry events off successfully. This in turn eventually led me to reshape my attitudes toward helping, my helping behaviours, and facilitative procedures.

Conclusion

In summary, the learning partnership experience was a rich experience in learning for myself, as I know it was for Casey. It was a place for us to gain facility with the skills of reflection. It was a place where we could break free of our socialized perspectives and interests and find new perspectives on our experiences of life and classes. It was a place where we could convert intense feelings into insights, where we could separate issues of self-esteem from issues of learning, where we could express reservations and doubts about class and life experiences, and where we could explore important learning issues. Most important, it was a place where we could develop friendship, mutuality, interdependence, and self-esteem, and come to a much deeper understanding of ourselves.

3 The Learning Partnership as the Facilitators See It

An Interview with Marge Denis

Marge Denis is a member of the OISE Department of Adult Education instructional staff who has successfully participated in learning partnerships and used them in her courses. She stimulated the creation of this publication. The following comments are taken from an edited interview with Joan Robinson and Sharon Saberton.

The Use of Learning Partnerships at OISE

Interviewer: In the courses you teach, have you noticed that there has been an enhancement in learning through a learning partnership as opposed to people working individually?

Marge Denis: Oh, yes. How can I describe the difference? Well, it's both quantitative and qualitative. The difference emerges in people's commitment to and enthusiasm for the work. Occasionally, you would get the students who would opt not to join a learning group. I would watch them in their lonely struggle. On the other hand, the students who had learning partners were highly visible. I was very aware with you two. Your learning partnership really worked.

I.: When you recommend the use of learning partners in the courses you teach, how often do students take you up on your suggestion?

M.D.: Maybe half of each class chooses a learning partner; but I don't think all of them stay with a partner. You could liken the growth and development of a learning partnership to a marriage. You have the courtship, and it's exciting. Then comes the working through. And many don't work it through. Or they work it through and agree to split. I think a lot of learning partners just don't hang in with it.

I.: How do you work with the muddling or mucking around that happens in a learning partnership?

M.D.: I tell students in the beginning of a course that the muddling around is good. It's a part of the process: otherwise, people get so discouraged. I personally am very familiar with the muddling process, and yet I can get very hassled. I keep telling myself "hang on, it will soon be over." During the muddling around I do inane things; for example, scrub the floor, clean out the cupboards; however, whatever I am struggling with is on the back burner all the time. You don't give up, but you divert your attention. You go back and it's there. I just believe that so much. That's one of the secrets; half the people give up at that point and they never go on. The other half hang in there. The muddling around, in theological terms, is the wandering in the desert for forty years. The Israelites wandered in the desert looking for the Promised Land and many of them gave up. And some of them hung in there to arrive at the Promised Land. Muddling through is wandering in the desert: there is a Promised Land.

Being both a teacher and learner

I.: Do you find it easy to combine being the facilitator of a course and the kind of learning partner you would like to be?

M.D.: I find it very difficult with some students; there are a few students in every class who turn me into the parent. I really find that hard to deal with. I want to deal with them as peers. We are fellow searchers together. I'm more than just a traffic cop here. There are new things I would be glad to share with you, but you discover lots and lots of things too. There is no partnership when someone is trying to give me control.

I.: In a learning partnership where you have a parent and child relationship, you have a mentorship.

M.D.: Yes, a mentorship -- I am rather comfortable with that. I think that is legitimate and I see that as different from the parent transference. The mentor gives the students the freedom to go where they want to go. I feel like a mentor at OISE. I like the role better than the role of teacher. To me, the two concepts are quite different. You move from mentor to equal. I was a mentor to Sandy Budden and now we are professional peers. That's exciting when you start shifting and moving. Then it becomes a partnership. Sandy and I are partners in certain ways. We can plug into one another and get feedback. We can give feedback equally.

I.: Was she a student of yours?

M.D.: Yes. That's happened with a number of students. Jane McLeod was another. We did those "Y" workshops and developed the Learning Guide and accompanying card sort. Our relationship moved beyond a learning partnership into a solid friendship.

Issues and Problems in Learning Partnerships

I.: What do you see inhibiting learning partnerships?

M.D.: I feel that the competitive issue - comparison of grades, comparison of work - is very inhibiting and very destructive. Another inhibiting factor is dishonesty. I'm not talking about moral dishonesty; I'm talking about deep integrity. I'm convinced that honesty is a very difficult thing. I think in a learning partnership any lack of integrity has to be struggled with. Laziness is another inhibiting factor. If one partner is not pulling her load, then she is not giving to the other partner. If somebody is just being dragged along, then that's destructive. An issue I'm becoming increasingly aware of is how I'm affected by other people's energies. If you are with another person who is dragging, the situation can drain energy away.

I.: When is control an issue that inhibits?

M.D.: If there is trust in any give and take between people, then there is no problem about control. Control is a non-issue. I feel control is an issue where trust is lacking and where there is competitiveness. The more insecure a person is, the more she must control. If the learner is totally secure, then she can let any process spill over where it wants to go.

Successful learning partnerships

I.: We have talked about issues that inhibit a learning partnership. Could you tell us about successful experiences you have had with learning partnerships and identify the factors that made them effective for you?

M.D.: The first learning partnership I experienced was with Marilyn Taylor when we were doing our theses. We virtually kept each other alive. We heard these horror stories that

everything is all community in our department until you face the thesis. Then you go down the tube alone. What we heard was awful. The loneliness of it, the plugging away in the library or in your little garret churning out pages. We decided to work together every day. I went over to her place. We worked in the same room. What was interesting was that we never spoke to each other except at coffee break and at lunchtime. Except for little things, we never discussed one another's work. The partnership was basically for support. The real thing that was triggered off for me was energy. I know from my own experience that you get twice as much done if there is somebody else in the same room. You don't have to be doing the same thing. There's something mysterious about physical energy begetting physical energy. And that's what happened to Marilyn and me in the same room. She typed her first draft and I worked longhand. Somehow, my scratching away or her pecking away kept the other person going. It was safe and the energy was generated in the room.

If either one of us wanted to talk about something in our lives, that was a block for the work at present, then we would stop and deal with it. Marilyn and I trusted each other.

I.: Did you find a learning partner when you first came to OISE as a student?

M.D.: When I first went to OISE, I was exhausted. I had "lived" on the highways and airplanes for seven years going from reserve to reserve in the Northwest. I had been with very basic, concrete things. I couldn't read a book to save my soul. I mean, I read parts of books, but I was in such a state of fatigue ... in addition, when you work with native people, you almost can't stand the theoretical. I sat and talked to people for a year and a half. I never had such rich conversation. In talking with people, I got the books

"concretized." This is what kept me focused on the abstract material in books and lectures.

Heather Bates and I didn't know or understand the concept of learning partnerships, but we both had a terrible time the first year. We kept looking at each other, thinking "Is she cool! I wish I were like her." Well, we mutually discovered in March we were both in absolute despair. As a result, Heather and I used to meet. These very casual meetings were devoted to talking about our feelings about what a trauma it was to come back to OISE. That was a very freeing thing. We spoke about other ideas, too.

I.: How do you envision a learning partnership?

M.D.: With Heather, it was high-process dealing with interpersonal and maintenance issus, not involving much task. I personally go to a learning partner, long-term or short-term, because of what you call the process. The only thing I need in a task is the energy. In fact, I'd almost say in terms of accomplishing the task, I'm not sure I need much help. The only help I need is getting the energy going and moving.

For me, it's process and not task. I have a feeling that's an individual difference. I think that I'm basically self-directed. Being creative and a bit original, I get impatient involving myself with other people's tasks. With my task, I'm already at another point, and that just drags me down. I need the personal to keep me balanced.

I.: I suspect that the concept doesn't work if the partnership is devoted only to tasks.

M.D.: Yes, we can't ignore tasks. The learning partnership is related to a certain task: learning. For me, if the

partnership were only maintenance in process then it would be a social relationship. I see myself as basically a task-oriented person. So maintenance in the partnership is for the task. In a learning partnership a need is fulfilled. My needs relate to maintenance, not the task, because I'm capable of doing the task.

I go to a learning partnership because it fulfils the maintenance need. Maintenance needs are support, confrontation, etc. The strength I bring to a learning partnership would be my clarity about the task. I don't have any problem with that. But the other can be a block to actually letting my energy flow around the task. And that's where I can be a learning partner, to release blocks. For me, learning partners remove blocks. Barriers and learning blocks are for me mainly internal. From a personal standpoint my learning blocks are inside of me.

I.: When you say inside of you, does that have to do with self-perception?

M.D.: Yes. Getting energy flowing for whatever reason may have to do with self-perception. A partner can give me objectivity and help remove serious blocks.

I.: What attracts you to a potential learning partner?

M.D.: Well, I recognize similarities in people that I feel very comfortable with. It's like looking in the mirror. I mean, it sounds a bit arrogant, but it's like looking for a kindred spirit. I think with myself, it's the value system. Part of the pattern for me is the recognition of similar value systems.

I.: What are the components of that system?

M.D.: I'll name those that I think would be recognizable to all three of us. Recognition of kindred spirits at OISE has been a source of great joy. I recognize in other people during the first conversation that they are people for whom spiritual values hold the forefront. Surface or material things are not important. It's more the human values where people appreciate joy and beauty; I recogize that right away. So I think that's the basic thing.

I.: Is there some kind of pattern you can recognize that gets you to the point where you feel that commonality?

M.D.: For me, it's a gut feeling, either it's there or it isn't.

The Use of Learning Partnerships beyond OISE

I.: Do you use the idea of learning partnerships in other settings in addition to your courses at OISE?

M.D.: I find that I'm using the concept a lot in workshops. In this context learning partnerships are very brief. For example, last week, with the Sisters of Sion, to make their meeting more energetic, I asked them to choose another woman who would give them feedback about how they were speaking on the floor -- just a very casual thing. This helped to ground the experience. What you do is to legitimize the criticism in that kind of setting. You actively ask for criticism in a very "boundaried" way and it's safe. That seemed to work quite well.

I.: Did you help them set up the boundaries?

M.D.: No.

I.: That just happened between two people?

M.D.: I'm aware that some did do it. When the suggestion is made, people look at you wide-eyed. I say, well, choose somebody, and ask somebody to give you feedback on your contributions to the assemblies or the small groups. I had trained twenty of them as small-group facilitators. I asked them each to choose in their small group one of the women to give feedback on how they were as facilitators. If they were talking too much, or doing too much leading, the partners were to give them a nudge or a kick. They were just amazed. It's a very common idea and simple, yet there is a big payoff for them, because permission is given to say a lot of things that they might be very sensitive about.

I.: Do you think learning partnerships could be used in high school and post secondary settings?

M.D: Absolutely, especially high school. The kids are so naturally social. I'd like it to be legitimate for them to do their homework together, work out problems together. Remember when we went to school, we thought we were cheating, to work out something with someone else. As we think of it now, you are actually learning more when you work with others.

Areas of Future Study

I.: What more would you like to know about learning partners? Things that a facilitator and a learning partner would like to know?

M.D.: Right now, I would like to know the theory, and this is what I see you two generating. And by theory, I mean that I would like to know how people pick a learning partner.

I would like to know the stages of development of the partnership - for example, the life of the partnership. I suspect that it's similar to group growth: gimme, gripe, grope, and grasp. And I would love to know answers to the questions about the relationship of the developmental or maturation process or stages to a learning partnership.

I.: I wonder if control becomes a problem in partnerships where one partner is significantly older or younger than the other?

M.D.: That's a very interesting question. I was over forty when I began my graduate work. I wasn't looking for control or power any more, but if I had been younger, I probably would have been.

Earlier I talked about the importance for my energy level of working in the same room with Marilyn, even though each of us was working on our own project. I think it would be interesting to do some work on that concept of energy. I would also like to know the characteristics of the successful partnership and the unsuccessful partnership. If you could get people to talk about that, I'm sure a pattern would emerge.

It's very exciting to watch a good idea become a concept and then a theory. This is what happened in my last class. I remember seeing "learning partners" go up on the wall as an area to explore in the course, then seeing a number of people choose it. I was thinking, "What are they going to do with that topic?" In my own mind, it hadn't yet had the possibility of being a concept, much less a theory. And yet, you people have moved it to a possible theory for me. When it first went up, it was a neat idea. That's very exciting and that's how theory comes about. So you are theory builders. There could be a thesis out of this.

A Teacher's View of Learning Partners; or, Why Didn't I Think of It Years Ago?

Virginia Griffin

The Origin of the Learning Partner Idea

The idea of having students in my classes form learning partnerships grew out of my observations of class members during the term when two doctoral students, Heather Bates McLean and Marilyn Taylor, were interviewing students in my class for their dissertations. They interviewed seven or eight of the students, individually, for at least an hour during the week following each class session. The interviews were open-ended and started with a question such as, "What has been happening for you this week in 1110?" The result was that those seven or eight students did more reflection, made more meaning of their experience, and synthesized their ideas more clearly than they would have done privately, because they had someone -- Marilyn and Heather -- to talk to. For some, the reflection, meaning-making, and synthesis happened as they prepared to talk to the interviewers; for others it happened while they talked. The result was that they came to class sessions confident and able to articulate what they were learning, to describe the next steps they needed to take, or to pinpoint their confusion. The result within the total class was noticeable and electric. By example they stimulated and encouraged those who were not being interviewed. It was not an easier class to facilitate, but it was richer. I resolved at the end of it to find a way to create a similar effect in future classes when there would be no researchers to interview students.

I considered three possible substitutes for the researcher interviews:

(1) to encourage more strongly each student to keep a learning journal;
(2) to encourage the whole class to have lunch together in the cafeteria; and
(3) to have students "interview" each other.

The learning journal was a device some students were already using to good effect. But some didn't find it useful: they needed more stimulation than sitting down to face a blank sheet of paper or a tape recorder. (I became very aware of this need when Heather Bates McLean told me one of her interviewees, who had to travel out of town one week, had told her he would tape-record his experiences that week rather than keep the interview appointment. When he tried to talk to the tape, he couldn't; he needed a real person sitting there listening to him and asking probing questions.)

The second idea, having lunch together, was not a practical idea for all classes, even though some previous groups had done it spontaneously, with good results for them and for the class. It would not work when some in the class were part-time students and had to get back to their jobs, or when they had other classes after ours, or when they had long distances to travel to return home.

The third idea, to have students "interview" one another, grew into the idea of each person having a learning partner. How innocently and unknowingly great ideas are born!

I now strongly encourage students in my classes to form a learning partnership with one or two others in the class. Some of their experiences with the idea are reported in other

sections of this monograph. I will report some of my own experiences, as a teacher, with these partnerships.

How Learning Partnerships Assist in Resolving Teaching Dilemmas

Whatever values you hold as a teacher, their interaction with reality results in constant dilemmas. I have found that by encouraging my students to form learning partnerships, some of my most difficult dilemmas have been largely resolved (and my energy is released to become aware of and deal with other dilemmas).

Any group larger than seven or eight does not allow each person enough "air time" to explore, test, and share his thoughts, feelings, insights, and applications. Nearly all classes are larger than this, so some time in class is usually devoted to small group discussion. I see these small groups as contributing a chance for each person to be exposed to a range of perspectives; however, they do not provide a chance for in-depth exploration with someone with whom one has some sense of continuity. The learning partnerships can provide this needed addition to small-group activity in class.

We try to enable learners to be as self-directed as possible in an interdependent learning group. This means that we share some activities, always with the awareness that each person may, while participating, have unique intentions for his own learning. This makes it difficult to help each person in the class find and enunciate the personal meaning for himself in a shared activity. However, with a learning partner, a person can find the time and support to uncover the meaning relevant to his own goals.

Because individuals are working on somewhat different goals in my class, they read different books and articles, or read most "strongly suggested" articles at different times during the course -- whenever the article seems relevant to the individual. At other times, articles are distributed after a shared activity. All of these situations make it difficult to discuss materials in full class sessions; yet students do find it useful to discuss with others what they are reading. Learning partners often agree to read the same articles or books, and then discuss them with a depth made possible from knowing each other well.

Much of our class approach is experiential learning (contrasted with information-assimilation approach) activity, using most of our class-time interaction as the experience from which to learn, rather than structured exercises of limited duration. There is seldom time in class to complete the experiential learning cycle - that is, to experience a concrete action and its effects; to reflect on the experience; to understand the effects; to understand the general principle at work in the concrete experience; and to apply the principle in new circumstances.[1] We find it possible to complete the first two steps most often, and sometimes to complete the third, but we almost never get to the important fourth.

When we do use an information-assimilation approach in class, we seldom have time to receive information; assimilate and organize information so that the general principle is

---

[1] James S. Coleman, "Differences Between Experiential Learning and Classroom Learning" in Morris T. Keeton et al., eds. Experiential Learning: Rationale, Characteristics, and Assessment (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976) pp. 51-52.

understood; infer a particular application from the general principle; and apply the knowledge gained.[2] Once again, learning partners can help each other work through the steps not completed in class, and can do so with greater personal specificity than could be attained in a class of 25 people with diverse work situations and backgrounds.

My classes are not intended to be encounter groups; not all persons come with an expectation of intense personal change. However, many do find themselves experiencing personal change in an environment in which it is not appropriate to spend the necessary time and effort to help 25 people deal with these changes. One way to resolve this dilemma is through the use of a learning partnership in which the partners have chosen each other with care; that relationship can provide needed support and trust.

I find that it is very difficult for some students to tell me or the class as a whole of any difficulties they are having with the course. Yet we all need the information if we are to plan helpful class activities. Admitting that you are not able to cope requires much courage and trust in other people. Telling one friend is easier, especially if you discover that the friend is having similar difficulties. Support from the learning partner can enable one to find the courage to bring the difficulty to the attention of the class or to me, or to find some other way to cope.

The reader will recognize in the foregoing that our classes are based on perspectives of learning that are different from those in traditional learning situations. This challenges learners in our program to examine their own assumptions, and

---

[2] Ibid., pp. 50-51.

perhaps to change their perceptions. My course is one in which it is appropriate to be explicit about examining and shifting perspectives. Even so, making such a shift is confusing and disorienting; choosing not to shift is also threatening. Learners need much support and help. I provide all I can, but that is insufficient, especially when I am seen at one phase in the process as the cause of the problem. Learning partners who meet weekly and who develop a relationship of some depth are much more able to help one another with these significant transitions.

Problems with the Learning Partner Idea

A learning partnership is different from any other relationship. Because it is different and unfamiliar, and because the student is expected to choose a partner from a limited number of people who are probably all strangers, learners do have difficulties making a commitment to the idea and carrying it out. The following are some of the issues they face.

Selection of a learning partner

The "right person" will be one who is compatible, interesting, supportive, stimulating, and challenging -- and one who has a schedule similar enough that the partners can find time to meet during the week. The process of selection involves getting to know others sufficiently well to make a decision, as well as choosing the kind of person with whom you would like to embark on a journey into this "unknown territory." There is the dilemma of deciding whether to wait to be asked, or to do the asking yourself.

Investment of one's self in the partnership

Many adults have been very independent as learners all through school. They may be accustomed to giving help to others but find it difficult to accept or seek help. Since both giving and taking help are part of a learning partnership, the investment of self in the relationship may be tentative at first and become greater over time.

Focus of learning

The focus of learning chosen in a learning partnership can vary from one team to another, and with each team over time. It might be planned, or it might "just happen" with whatever is uppermost in the minds of the partners when they meet. Often, the partners find that as they develop more and deeper trust in themselves and in others, the focus of their learning becomes much deeper and more personal.

Management of learning

Ensuring that the time spent with the learning partner is as productive as possible is a great challenge. Constant monitoring of "how it is going" is useful and takes only a little time. Ideas for making the partnership more useful can be exchanged. One person reported that he found it useful to write in his journal after a meeting with his learning partner so that some of the ideas they had explored would not "slip away." Most of us have probably experienced this kind of loss.

Learning how to be helpful

If the partnership is to be effective, both partners will have to give attention to providing support and challenge, listening carefully, staying focused, and helping the partner learn what he can do that will be helpful to you.

Control and openness

Some people are easily able to move into a learning partnership, and develop it to suit themselves, and let it grow and evolve. Others cannot begin until the task is carefully defined and they can see how they are going to be able to control their experience. Others need to have control over their partners. Still others welcome being controlled. I cannot claim that any pattern is better than another, but it does seem important that people who form a learning partnership have similar or compatible expectations and stances toward these issues.

Friendship and sexuality

A learning partnership that is effective can have such personal meaning and richness to the partners that it begins to overshadow other relationships in one's life. Partners sometimes have to make a decision whether to extend the relationship into a long-term friendship or even a more intimate relationship. Expectations and feelings in this regard may have to be made explicit and discussed openly.

Handling disappointment

Not all learning partnerships are effective. After every effort is made to work out differences, some partnerships still have to be dissolved. Other partnerships will be only

partly effective or not living up to all they could be. Partners can do much to overcome this problem by periodic reviewing of how things are going, and exchanging ideas about what would make the partnership more helpful.

Relationship to the rest of the class

I have seen a few instances in which the learning partnership had become so important and satisfying to the partners involved that those individuals had little energy or inclination to contribute or to participate in the larger class group. More often, the learning partnership enhances the individuals' participation in the larger group, but the reverse sometimes happens. One suggestion for dealing with this problem is to set aside a brief time during class for learning partners to tell the group what they are doing and the ideas they have explored since the last class meeting.

Teacher attitudes

I have had a checkered history with the learning partner idea; some experiences have been better than others. The better experiences were accompanied by certain attitudes on my part. Foremost among these attitudes is a firm belief in the benefits to be derived from having a learning partner. This belief is communicated not by requiring students to form learning partnerships, but by explaining the benefits as I and other students have experienced them. In addition, I try to provide class time and to suggest activities that will help students get to know others in the class; they will then be able to select their partners and identify skills that will be useful in the partnership. Some of these skills will be ones they already have: others will be ones they can develop.

Another attitude that is required of the teacher in a course that has learning partners is a large bundle of trust -- trust that not only allows but encourages the most significant "meaning-making" to occur in settings where the teacher is not present; trust that keeps the teacher from attempting to structure the experience or to specify the learning tasks to be undertaken or the nature of the relationship to be sought. The teacher must trust in the relationship to grow to the level desired or needed by the individuals in the partnership. The teacher who has the necessary trust will also allow an individual who chooses not to enter a learning partnership to decline the opportunity.

A third attitude th t deserves mention concerns the teacher's belief in her potential contribution to the learning of her students, even though they may turn more often to their learning partners for help than to her. The students will become more effective learners, freeing her (and challenging her) to bring forth her highest skills as a teacher and learner. The course then becomes more rewarding and satisfying to all persons involved in it.

4 The Concept Used in Settings Other than OISE

Applying the Partnership Concept in Training Programs

Sharon Saberton

Because of my own positive experience as a learning partner, I introduced the concept into two training programs at the Toronto Institute of Medical Technology. One program, "Teaching Techniques," is a two-week course designed for instructors and clinical instructors of allied health programs; it is aimed at developing teaching skills. The other program, "Diagnostic Radiography," is a two-year training program for medical radiation technologists.

In the "Teaching Techniques" course the partnership concept was introduced using my own experience as a model. As a facilitator, I encouraged learning partnerships, and they formed informally. Learning partners discussed with one another new educational theories that they were introduced to in the course, as well as concerns related to their new role as teachers. Partners explored and selected topics for their individual ten-minute micro-teaching presentation. They frequently co-operated in rehearsals, and a learning partner often was "coached" to ask the right question in the actual presentation. Learning partners provided one another with support and positive feedback. As the trust level increased, a more critical evaluation of teaching was often solicited by the learning partners.

During the "Teaching Techniques" course, two participants asked me for help in designing a self-study program to prepare them to write the advanced certification examination in radiotherapy technology. I suggested that a learning partner or "study buddy" might be helpful in reducing feelings of isolation. They readily agreed, and at their request I assisted them in establishing a learning parnership. Both partners were young mothers with full-time jobs, and they had only six months to prepare for the exams. They decided that lunch hours would be the best time to meet and that formal agendas would be necessary. We worked together in designing a broad timetable related to subject matter and in compiling the agenda for their first meeting. Since both partners have very crowded schedules, a number of ground rules related to family and work were estabished at this time. Their commitment to the task and the partnership was evident. I met with them three months later, and they advised me that the learning partnership continued to be an effective way to prepare for the advanced certification exams.

In the "Diagnostic Radiography" program the partnership concept was also introduced using my own experience as a model, and once again learning partnerships formed informally. Some settings in which the concept has been successfully applied include radiographic technique positioning labs, electrocardiogaphy (ECG) labs, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) labs. In all of these lab situations one partner acts as the technologist and the other as the patient. In the ECG and CPR labs a printout of the technologist's performance and the patient's condition is produced. Using this printout, learning partners evaluate one another's performance and physical condition. These procedures provide useful learning, and humor is an important component of the learning process. Learning partners also work together in critical reviews of radiographs and in question and response in anatomy.

The TIMT "Diagnostic Radiography" program is currently being redesigned, and as of September 1985 the majority of the curriculum will be presented in a modular format rather than in lectures. Students will be encouraged to take a responsible role in achieving their own education. We intend to introduce the learning partnership concept early in the program. The staff development officer and a radiography instructor will spend time with the students talking about how to select a partner and about the agreements that need to be established early in the partnership. Students will be encouraged to select a partner within the first two weeks of the program; they will be required to sign up for open labs in pairs in the third week. Based on our previous experience, we believe that learning partnerships will enrich our program.

The Use of Learning Partnerships in a Five-Day Residential Lab

Joan D. Conway

In 1983 Joan Conway and two colleagues recommended that participants in the "Educational and Program Design Laboratory" held annually at the Atlantic Christian Training Centre in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia, seek to establish learning partnerships for a five-day residential lab. The staff was interested in helping participants to develop their personal reflective abilities and in becoming more skillful in helping others reflect on their learning.

There were nineteen participants whose ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the mid-sixties. Their occupational backgrounds were varied: social services, the clergy, nursing, and international development. Several guidelines for the partnerships were suggested, such as contracting with partners for frequency and length of meetings.

At the end of the conference thirteen reported through a formal evaluation that the partnership had contributed to their learning and that they would seek similar relationships in other learning contexts. Eight participants indicated that they would like to continue their current partnership after the lab.

Because of the overwhelmingly positive response to using partnerships during this lab, the Centre has decided to use them in subsequent events. Learning partnerships demonstrated several advantages over the support groups that had been used in the past. Their most important effect was to include and go beyond support to building an intentional learning relationship.

Notes on Assorted Applications of Learning Partnerships

Virginia Griffin

1. Liz Burge, who is giving leadership to the development of distance-mode, resource-based courses at OISE, has included the idea of learning partners in the resource manual sent to students involved in several courses offered in the distance mode. A section entitled "Learning Partnerships - Helping Yourself to Learn" answers questions learners typically ask when the idea of having a learning partner is suggested to them. Burge concludes with a two-page guide for reflection on some processes of learning, which she adapted from my own work on processes. Burge says learners describe the idea of learning partnerships as "a very good idea." It is too soon to tell whether they follow through and form successful partnerships.

2. Sharon Saberton has received an award from the Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists for her work manual, Learning Partnerships: A Forum for Interdependent Learning in Diagnostic Radiography Training Programs. The contents of the manual relate to the work described elsewhere in this report. The newsletter of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (March 1985, pp. 3-5) published an article by Sharon Saberton on the subject of learning partners.

3. Dr. Casey Gehrels, assistant superintendent, Lakehead Board of Education, has launched a pilot project helping school principals form trios of learning partners. Each trio will help each other with personal learning, mainly through reflection on and interpretation of personal experience derived from on-the-job activities and relationships. The trios were formed (from volunteers) to reflect as much variety as possible in experience, leadership style, and type of school. Dr. Gehrels reports, "We are extremely pleased with the enthusiastic response of our staff to the project and expect that it will greatly asist us, as professionals, on our mutual learning journeys." Dr. Gehrels' article describing this project will be published in a forthcoming issue of The Canadian School Executive.

5 Annotated Bibliography

Aspy, David N. Toward a Technology for Humanizing Education. Champaign, Ill.: Research Press Company, 1972. By "Technology," Aspy refers to ways to make abstractions such as "empathy," "congruence," and "unconditional positive regard" more concrete. He provides us with ways to know the extent to which we are exhibiting these qualities in our interpersonal relationships, and offers guidelines for improving our usefulness as helpers, or, in our terms, as learning partners. Aspy shows that students in classrooms with teachers who exhibit the above-named qualities make more cognitive gain. His research context was the childhood classroom, but his descriptions of humane behaviour on the part of the teacher are relevant to adults.

Boud, David, Keough, Rosemary, And Walker, David, eds. Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning. London: Kogan Page, 1985. A crucial process in a learning partnership is reflecting on experience. Yet many adult educators score low on "reflective observation" in Kolb's learning-style inventory. Many of us have not been taught how to reflect on our experience to achieve any but the most obvious information. This book is of use to those who would like reflecting to be a more productive process, In the first chapters, the editors describe reflection and present a model for use in promoting reflection in learning. Subsequent chapters that should be useful to learning partners include "Debriefing in Experience-Based Learning," "Reflection and Learning: The Importance of the Listener," and "The Role of Reflection in a Co-operative Inquiry."

Boyd, Evelyn M., and Fales, Ann W. "Reflective Learning: Key to Learning from Experience." Journal of Humanistic Psychology 23, no. 2 (Spring, 1983). This article reports on how some adults reflect as they learn, and how they learn how to be more conscious of their reflection. The researchers used four groups of people: graduate students in adult education; practicing adult educators; counsellors in an ongoing clinical training program; and the authors themselves. Boyd and Fales report a generalized, six-stage process of reflective learning with allowances for individual variation. They define reflection as "the process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experience (present or past) in terms of self (self in relation to self and self in relation to the world)." Of special relevance to beginning learning partners who come together to reflect on their

experience is the observation of most of the persons studied that they considered themselves to be reflective persons, but they weren't aware of what it was they did when reflecting. By talking to the interviewers, they were able to describe what it is they did naturally. As they became aware of this natural reflecting process they felt a surge of energy, and they felt they could control the process and use it intentionally as a learning tool.

Gibb, Jack R. Trust: A New View of Personal and Organizational Development. Los Angeles: The Guild of Tutors Press, 1978. One of the most important ingredients in a learning partnership is trust. At least four chapters of this book are required reading for anyone involved in or thinking about becoming involved in a learning partnership: chapter 1, "Trusting Me, You, and the Process"; chapter 2, "Discovering How to Be Personal"; chapter 5, "Rhythm and Flow: A Set of Guidelines"; and chapter 3, "Transcending the Environment." The last two mentioned deserve further comment. Chapter 5 includes ten guidelines that can be used as a checklist by a person who is examining his or her own growth. These guidelines are also stated as ten "symptoms" of the growing, trusting, person that change as the trust level increases. In chapter 3 Gibb lists ten levels or phases of environmental quality from the lowest two -- primitive and autocratic - up to the highest -- transcendent and cosmic: he suggests ways in which this concept can be used. Learning partners might like to assess their relationship in terms of these phases over time. There are other chapters the reader may find useful. In the appendix are two instruments for self and team evaluation which learning partners may want to use and discuss with each other.

Kidd, J. Roby. How Adults Learn. Rev. Ed. New York: Association Press, 1973. The genius of the late Roby Kidd, a world-renowned adult educator, is evident in this book. Kidd was able to take widely diverse and complex material, integrate it, and express it in a simple, practical way. This book is basic reading for any adult who wants to be more knowledgeable about his own learning and for every adult educator. The revised edition is completely rewritten. Each page contains important insights. There are so many important and well-stated ideas that we'll content ourselves here to list the chapter titles: "Learning throughout Life"; "The Adult Learner"; "Physical and Sensory Capacity"; "Intellectual Capacities"; "The Affective Domain"; "Being and Becoming"; "Theories of Learning"; "Some Fields of Practice"; "Environmental Factors in Learning"; "The Learning Transaction"; and "The Teacher in the Learning Transaction."

Kolb, David A. Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984. This book indirectly provides a solid base for the idea of learning partnerships. Warren Bennis, in the last paragraph of his foreword, says: "... this is an important book, one the field has been waiting for, worth every ounce of energy it takes to read. But because of its revolutionary undertones, read it at your own risk. For each reader must take the risk of creating a life of his or her own. When you think about it, you're the thread that holds the events of your life together; that's what Kolb gets us to understand." Many of us immediately think of Learning Styles Inventory when Kolb's name is mentioned. He does not disappoint us; the inventory and its underlying ideas plus the characteristics of the basic learning styles and their relationship to Jungian personality types are included in this book. In chapter 1 the author explores "The Foundations of Contemporary Approaches to Experiential Learning." In chapter 2 he describes "The Process of Experiential Learning." Chapter 3, "Structural Foundations of the Learning Process," will be of interest to anyone becoming more aware of his own learning processes. Learning partners wishing to explore the credibility of their learning results will find Chapter 5, "The Structure of Knowledge," useful. The third section of the book deals with learning and development. Adults will find chapters 6 and 8 most relevant: chapter 6 is entitled "The Experiential Learning Theory of Development" and deals with learning as a transaction between the person and the environment, differentiation, integration, adaptation, consciousness, and other concepts. The final chapter, chapter 8, is entitled "Lifelong Learning and Integration Development." This is a dense book, but, as Bennis says, it is worth every ounce of energy it takes to read it.

Mamchur, Carolyn Marie. Insights: Understanding Yourself and Others. Toronto: OISE Press, 1984. This paperback book is based on Jungian personality types, and is written so creatively it is worth looking at even if you already understand or aren't yet interested in this framework of personality types. Learning partners should find it useful in understanding themselves and each other, and in exploring ways to help each other learn. There are basically four personality types in Jung's framework; sensing, intuitive, feeling, and thinking. After an introductory chapter which defines these types and their implications, the author presents four chapters in which she illustrates the perspective of each type in a style that type would find compatible. She weaves into these chapters other Jungian concepts of extroversion, introversion, judging, and perceiving. The author not only provides us with help in understanding another's perspective, as a basis for empathy, but also describes ways in which people of different

preferences can work together more effectively and overcome difficulties resulting from their differences.

Rogers, Carl A. A Way of Being. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980. This beautiful, inspiring book shows us the changes and the stabilities in Rogers' personal thinking during the 1970s. He reveals himself as a growing, learning, thinking being - still person-centered at age 78. He explores the aspects of a person-centered approach -- what it means in interpersonal relationships, what is involved in helping another learn, the theoretical and empirical foundations of the person-centered approach, and new challenges for someone in a helping profession who wishes to live the person-centered approach. In the final chapter he looks at the world of tomorrow and the person of tomorrow, and the implications for the person-centred approach. This book will give someone involved in a learning partnership an idea of why learning partnerships can be so effective; it can help one find the qualities in oneself needed to make a partnership effective. Rogers is a learner who has been able to say, "I am puzzled," "I was wrong," "I am still learning."

Schon, Donald A. The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action. New York: Basic Books, 1983. This book is of value to any professional at any stage of her career; for persons engaged in a learning partnership, it can have specific and special relevance. Chapter 5, "The structure of Reflection-in-Action" (with the clarification of examples given in the two preceding chapters) will help learners envision how they might help each other learn. The reader finds here more choice for the mode of relating than the simple one of support or challenge/confrontation. Reframing the problem, bringing past experience to bear on a unique situation, creating experiments for action, appreciating the affirmatives and surprises that result from the experiment, "dialoguing with the situation," are all activities in which the learning partner may serve as a guide. The reader may find legitimation for much of her typical mode of action in her professional life -- a mode of action she has long deemed to be inadequate because it doesn't live up to the standards of a now outdated technical rationality, a concept clearly explored by Schon.

Smith, Robert M. Learning How to Learn: Applied Theory for Adults. New York: Cambridge, 1982. Those engaged in learning partnerships frequently report that they learn a great deal about how they learn. This book should help them do so more systematically. In part I, Smith presents the theoretical basis important to his book: the concept of learning how to learn, the adult as learner (including six optimal conditions for learning), and learning style. In

Part II, he describes the developing of learning skills and understanding. Chapter 6, "Learning Collaboratively," and chapter 8, "Some Alternative Ways of Learning," should be most relevant to learning partners, but some will find the other chapters new and helpful. In Part III, the author focuses on providing training for others. The appendix contains much useful information, lists of resources, and learning exercises.

******

The materials listed above are widely available in libraries. For those who have access to the OISE library, the following theses, written in the adult education education department, are available and relevant.

Theses

Bates, Heather MacLean. "A Phenomenological Study of Adult Learners: Participants' Experiences of a Learner-Centered Approach." 1979.

Davies, Leeland J. "Energy Experiences of Adult Learners in Learning Groups." 1979.

Denis, Margaret M. "Toward the Development of a Theory of Intuitive Learning in Adults Based on a Descriptive Analysis." 1979.

Gehrels, Casey. "The School Principal as Learner." 1984.

Griffith, Gwyneth. "Images of Interdependence: Meaning and Movement in Teaching/Learning." 1982.

Kass, Raye. "The Apology Stance in the Learning Process." 1983.

Keane, Ross. "The Experience of Doubt and Associated Learning in Religious Men." 1985.

Taylor, Marilyn. "Adult Learning in an Emergent Learning Group: Toward a Theory of Learning from the Learner's Perspective." 1979.

We think learners everywhere (in classes, in churches, in prisons, in communities) should have the opportunity to have a learning partner. Therefore, we ask your help so that we can work toward this objective. Please send us your suggestions for improving this publication. Tell us of any applications of the partnership idea you know about. Tell us about the persons involved, how the idea is being applied, and the results.

Individuals or groups who might find this publication useful can obtain copies by writing to Dr. Virginia Griffin at the Department of Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5S 1V6.